

Declaring Peace With The Vietnamese

As commencement exercises proceed today, the war in Indo-China continues also. Students at Middlebury have protested and worked against the war for several years now. They have canvassed, lobbied, campaigned and petitioned. They have written their Congressmen and Senators and spoken with them personally. They have marched when necessary--in November of 1969 and on April 24 of this year. They observed the Moratorium, joined the Strike last spring and participated in Mayday. All of these actions were motivated by the same deep concern over America's tragic involvement in the affairs of the Indochinese.

It is altogether fitting that this concern find expression again today. Members of the senior class and others present who are wearing armbands do so to demonstrate their continuing opposition to the war and the Vietnam policies of the Nixon Administration. They hope that their symbolic gesture of protest will remind parents, alumni, and members of the local community that a war fought in our name is our responsibility; the task of ending it must be shared by all.

Many who wear armbands today have endorsed the document known as the People's Peace Treaty. The treaty is an unofficial agreement, negotiated by the National Student Assn. and student groups from north and south Vietnam, which declares a cessation of hostilities between the American and the Vietnamese people. It begins with the recognition that Americans and Vietnamese are not enemies. Its terms are based on the eight-point peace proposal introduced at the Paris talks last September by Madame Nguyen Thi Binh of the National Liberation Front delegation. The Treaty offers a realistic, just and honorable solution to the war--and one that is no doubt acceptable to most Americans.

The central point of the Treaty is that the United States must publicly set a date for the complete and unconditional withdrawal of all its forces from Vietnam. In return for a commitment to a total pull-out, the Communist side has agreed to beg in immediate negotiations for the return of all American prisoners and to establish a cease-fire during the withdrawal period that would safeguard the lives of remaining American troops.

Senators Hartke and McGovern and other Americans who have spoken with the Vietnamese in Paris believe that, if a withdrawal deadline is set, the fighting will be stopped in a matter of days and American POWs will be released even before the last American troops have left Vietnam. Without a fixed date for total withdrawal, there is no possibility of securing the return of American POW's, guaranteeing the safety of remaining American forces, or allowing the Vietnamese to determine their own political future free of American interference.

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The students and faculty at Middlebury who have supported the People's Peace Treaty realize, of course, that it is governments, not people, which make treaties and declare peace. But, while only the United States Government can end the war in Indochina, individual action against the war can have great impact. By endorsing the People's Peace Treaty, by doing something as simple as wearing armbands at commencement, individuals can attempt to disassociate themselves from their country's policy in Southeast Asia and identify, in a small way, with the principle victims of American intervention in that area.